

Inquiries into the Critical Care Setting

An Honors Thesis

By

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Abstract

Critical care nursing is a unique specialty that brings rise to many challenging obstacles to the nursing profession. Nursing schools have examined this challenge, and sought to include critical care curriculum into the course of study for nursing students. Within my critical care class as a nursing student, I participated in clinical hours at Ball Memorial Hospital. I have presented in this thesis project a set of five case studies that assess the patients under my care and outline their medical and nursing needs in the Intensive Care Unit, the Cardiac Intensive Care, and the Emergency Department. Through the formation of these five case studies, I have introspectively reflected on my experience as a way to examine my nursing skills and growth throughout this process.

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Process Analysis Statement

When beginning this thesis project, I hoped to better my patient care, establish my nursing skills, and effectively enhance my critical thinking. Through the process of interacting with the patients, families, and nurses in the critical care setting, I feel as though I have gained so much more. The process of nursing school is no easy summit, and my critical care course had been no exception, but in the completion of this class, and my clinical experiences noted in this project, I have without a doubt realized my true passion. Critical care nursing is not for the faint-at-heart. It is difficult in many different aspects, but I have begun to see that it is my calling.

Every week as my clinical experiences continued, I realized numerous things about myself, and the nursing profession as a whole. The first week, I was timid. I watched and observed things from afar, unless I was asked to do more. Although this is true, my watching peaked my interest in what critical care was all about. I hoped to explore more as the weeks went on. The second week was a real stepping stone in my journey. Watching a cardiac surgery allowed me to still watch, but as I watched, I was critically thinking about the patient's needs. I was continually assessing changes in my patient and thinking about how I would respond if I were the nurse. This week also showed me that cardiac care is one of my true passions. I know my personality is equipped to help people during a scary time such as having a heart operation and I feel this is where I want to start my nursing career.

By the third week, I was so ready to keep learning, and I was not disappointed. This week I did not observe but I responded; I interacted with my patient, and their family. The third week I learned that critical care is not just about your patient, it is about their family as well. This is another piece of the critical care setting that I love. I think because I am a people-oriented person, I enjoy taking the time to get to know my patients and their families on a more personal